



Child Welfare Information Gateway

PROTECTING CHILDREN ■ STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

A FACTSHEET
FOR FAMILIES

July 2000

*Esta hoja informativa es
disponible en español
[www.childwelfare.gov/
pubs/esta.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/esta.cfm)*

Are You Pregnant and Thinking About Adoption?



If you are pregnant and not sure that you want to keep the baby, you might be thinking about adoption.

Pregnancy causes many changes, both physical and emotional. It can be a very confusing time for a woman, even in the best of circumstances. Talking to a counselor about your options might help. But how do you start?

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau



Child Welfare Information Gateway
Children's Bureau/ACYF
1250 Maryland Avenue, SW
Eighth Floor
Washington, DC 20024
703.385.7565 or 800.394.3366
Email: info@childwelfare.gov
www.childwelfare.gov

This factsheet gives you, the birth mother, information about counseling and adoption. If you want more information on these adoption issues, or any others, please visit the Child Welfare Information Gateway website at www.childwelfare.gov or call 703.385.7565 or 800.394.3366.

Who Can I Talk to About My Options?

If you want to talk to a professional about your options, there are different places you can go. Counseling at the places listed below will be free or cost very little.

- *Crisis pregnancy center*—This is a place where they talk only to pregnant women. It might even have a maternity center attached where you could live until the baby is born.
- *Family planning clinic*—This is a place where women get birth control information or pregnancy tests.
- *Adoption agency*—This choice is good if you are already leaning strongly in the direction of adoption.
- *Health Department or Social Services*—A food stamps or welfare worker can tell you which clinic or department is the right one.
- *Mental health center or family service agency*—Counselors at these places help all kinds of people in all kinds of situations.

No matter where you go for counseling, a counselor should always treat you with respect and make you feel good about your-

self. A counselor may have strong feelings about adoption, abortion, and parenting a child. Nevertheless, those feelings should not influence their professional advice nor the treatment provided to you. In order to make up your own mind, it is important for you to get clear answers from your counselor to the three questions found in the box below. The answers to these questions will help you choose the best option.

If I feel I cannot carry my pregnancy to term, how will you help me?

If I decide to take care of my baby myself, how will you help me do that?

If I want to place my baby for adoption, will you help me find an adoption agency or attorney who will listen to what I think is right for us?

If you are not happy with the answers you get, you may wish to find a counselor at another place. Information Gateway can tell you about crisis pregnancy centers and adoption agencies in each State, and can also help you find other counseling agencies in your area.

Should I Place My Child For Adoption?

The decision to place a child for adoption is a difficult one. It is an act of great courage and much love. Remember, adoption is permanent. The adoptive parents will raise your child and have legal authority for his or her

welfare. You need to think about these questions as you make your decision.

Have I explored all possibilities?

Pregnancy can affect your feelings and emotions. Are you only thinking about adoption because you have money problems, or because your living situation is difficult? These problems might be temporary. Have you called Social Services to see what they can do, or asked friends and family if they can help? If you have done these things and still want adoption, you will feel more content with your decision.

Will the adoptive parents take good care of my child?

Prospective adoptive parents are carefully screened and give a great deal of information about themselves. They are visited in their home several times by a social worker and must provide personal references. They are taught about the special nature of adoptive parenting before an adoption takes place. By the time an agency has approved adoptive parents for placement, they have gotten to know them very well, and feel confident they would make good parents. This does not promise that they will be perfect parents, but usually decent people who really want to care for children.

Will my child wonder why I placed him (or her) for adoption?

Probably. But adoption in the 1990's is probably a lot different from what it was when you were growing up. Most adopted adults realize that their birth parents placed them for adoption out of love, and because it was the best they knew how to do. Hopefully your child will come to realize that a lot of

his or her wonderful traits come from you. And if you have an open adoption, it is likely that you will be able to explain to the child why you chose adoption.

Why am I placing my child for adoption?

If your answer is because it is what you, or you and your partner think is best, then it is a good decision. Now it is time to move forward, and not feel guilty.

What Are the Different Types of Adoption?

There are two types of adoptions, confidential and open.

Confidential: The birth parents and the adoptive parents never know each other. Adoptive parents are given background information about you and the birth father that they would need to help them take care of the child, such as medical information.

Open: The birth parents and the adoptive parents know something about each other. There are different levels of openness:

- *Least open*—You will read about several possible adoptive families and pick the one that sounds best for your baby. You will not know each other's names.
- *More open*—You and the possible adoptive family will speak on the telephone and exchange first names.
- *Even more open*—You can meet the possible adoptive family. Your social worker or attorney will arrange the meeting at the adoption agency or attorney's office.

- *Most open*—You and the adoptive parents share your full names, addresses, and telephone numbers. You stay in contact with the family and your child over the years, by visiting, calling, or writing each other. Fifteen States have enacted laws that recognize postadoption contact between adoptive and birth families if the parties have voluntarily agreed to this plan.

Talk to your counselor about the type of adoption that is best for you. Do you want to help decide who adopts your child? Would you mind if a single person adopted your child, or a couple of a different race than you? Would you like to be able to share medical information with your child's family that may only become known in the future?

If you have strong feelings about these things, work with an agency or attorney who you feel will listen to what you want.

If you do not have strong feelings about these things, the adoption agency or attorney will decide who adopts your child based on who they think can best care for the child.

How Do I Arrange an Adoption Through an Agency?

In all States, you can work with a licensed child placing (adoption) agency. In all but four States, you can also work directly with an adopting couple or their attorney without using an agency.

Private adoption agencies arrange most infant adoptions. To find private adoption agencies in your area, either contact

Information Gateway or look in the yellow pages of your local phone book under "Adoption Agencies."

There are several types of private adoption agencies. Some are for profit and some are nonprofit. Some work with prospective adoptive parents of a particular religious group, though they work with birth parents of all religions.

When you contact adoption agencies, ask the social workers as many questions as you need to ask so that you understand the agencies' rules. Some questions you will want to ask are in the box below.

Will I get counseling all through my pregnancy, after I sign the papers allowing my child to be adopted, and after my baby is gone?

Can my baby's father and other people who are important to me join me in counseling if they want to?

What kind of financial help can I get? What kind of medical and legal help will I have? Can I get help with medical and legal expenses?

What will I get to know about the people who adopt my baby? May I tell you what I think are important traits for parents to have? How do you know the adoptive parents are good people? May I meet them if I want, or know their names? Will I ever be able to have contact with them or my child? Will I ever know how my child turns out?

What information will you provide to the adoptive parents about me and my family?

The agency social worker will ask you questions to find out some information about you and the baby's father, such as your medical histories, age, race, physical characteristics, whether you have been to see a doctor since you became pregnant, whether you have been pregnant or given birth before, and whether you smoked cigarettes, took any drugs, or drank any alcohol since you became pregnant. The social worker asks these questions so that the baby can be placed with parents who will be fully able to care for and love the baby, not so that she can turn you down.

How Do I Arrange a Private Adoption?

An adoption arranged without an adoption agency is called an independent or private adoption. It is legal in all States except Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, and Minnesota. With a private adoption, you need to find an attorney to represent you. Look for an attorney who will not charge you a fee if you decide not to place your baby for adoption. You also need to find adoptive parents. Here's how you find both of these.

To Find an Attorney

Legal Aid—This is a service available in most communities for people who cannot afford a private attorney. Sometimes it is located at a university law school. NOTE: Some States allow the adopting parents to pay your legal fees, so going to Legal Aid may not be necessary.

State Attorney Association or the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys—These groups can refer you to an attorney who handles adoptions in your area. The Child Welfare Information Gateway National Adoption Directory (www.childwelfare.gov/nad) lists attorney referral services for each State. You also can contact the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys at P.O. Box 33053, Washington, DC 20033-0053.

To Find Adoptive Parents

Personal Ads—Some newspapers carry personal ads from people seeking to adopt. You call the number in the ad and get to know each other over the telephone. If you think you want to work with the couple, have your attorney call their attorney. The attorneys will work out all the arrangements according to what you and the adoptive parents want and the laws of your State.

Your Doctor—He or she may know about couples who are seeking a child, and be able to help arrange the adoption.

Adoptive Parent Support Groups—Parents who have already adopted may know other people seeking to adopt. You can find these groups through the National Adoption Directory (www.childwelfare.gov/nad).

National Matching Services—These services help birth parents and adoptive parents find one another. Contact Information Gateway for more information.

Of course, personal referrals are always good. Ask friends and family if they know any attorneys or possible adoptive parents.

What if My Baby Is a Child of Color?

There are some special considerations if your baby is a child of color, such as African-American, Hispanic, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander or biracial.

If it is important to you that the parents adopting your child be of the same ethnic or racial background as your child, you will need to locate an agency or attorney with such families approved and waiting for placement. You can choose which kind of agency you work with and which family your child goes to. Ask agencies or attorneys if they work with families of color and if they have families of color in their pool of approved families. Many agencies provide expectant parents with photos and summaries of prospective adoptive families to help them choose the adoptive family for their child.

You should be aware that two Federal laws (P.L. 103-382 and P.L. 104-188) prohibit adoption agencies receiving Federal funding from delaying or denying placement of a child with a prospective adoptive family in order to achieve racial or ethnic matching. These laws affect public adoption agencies as well as any private adoption agencies receiving any Federal funding.

Some agencies may not be as welcoming to you as they could be. If it is important to you that your child be placed with adoptive parents where at least one parent is of the same race as your child and agencies do not have them in their pool of applicants, they may be concerned that they will not be able

to find a family for your child right away. Not all agencies recruit families of color and some agencies charge fees that can be prohibitive for many families.

Some agencies specialize in finding families for children of color. They work very hard to let people know that children of color are available for adoption. They also try to make the adoption process less complicated and intrusive for families.

Contact Information Gateway for the names, addresses and telephone numbers of adoption agencies that specialize in working with families of color, or for all the adoption agencies in your State. The information is free.

How Do I Arrange for Future Contact With My Child if I Want it?

If you decide on a confidential adoption, you may still wish to make sure that your child can contact you in the future. There are things you can do now to make that happen.

Many people who are adopted as children later want to meet their birth parents. With the exception of Alabama, Alaska, Delaware, Kansas, Oregon, and Tennessee, State laws do not permit them to see their original birth certificate. Because of these problems, many States, and some private national organizations, have set up adoption registries to help people find one another.

A registry works like this: You leave the information about the birth of the child

and your address and telephone number. You must keep your address and telephone number current. You can register at any time, even years after the child is born.

When your child is an adult, he or she can call or write this registry. If what the child knows about his or her birth matches what the registry has, the registry will release your current address and telephone number to the child, and you could be contacted.

There is another way to ensure that your child can contact you if he or she wishes. Some adoption agencies and attorneys who arrange private adoptions will hold a letter in their file in which you say why you chose adoption and how to get in touch with you if the child ever wants to. If the agency or attorney that you are working with will not agree to do this, you may wish to work with somebody else.

There are several national organizations (see below) that offer ongoing advice and support to birth parents, information about contact and reunion with their children, and many other things. People in these organizations have already gone through what you are going through. They will be very helpful and understanding if you need someone to talk to. These organizations or the staff of Information Gateway can refer you to a group near you.

Organizations for Birth Parents

Concerned United Birthparents
800.822.2777
www.cubirthparents.org

American Adoption Congress
202.483.3399
www.americanadoptioncongress.org

International Soundex Reunion Registry
775.882.7755
www.isrr.net